



TIPS

for Patients With MS

In addition to physical symptoms, multiple sclerosis (MS) may have significant effects on emotions. Some of these may be reactions to living with a chronic, unpredictable disease, while others may be due to the disease itself—demyelination and nerve fiber damage can result in emotional changes.

❑ **Depression.** Depression is common among patients with MS and has many symptoms, including prolonged sadness, loss of interest in things you used to enjoy, appetite changes, sleep problems, fatigue, and suicidal thoughts. It doesn't mean you have a weak character, but rather, it may indicate a chemical imbalance in the brain.

TIP: Depression is highly treatable, so talk with your physician. Depression can be treated with counseling and/or prescription medications.

❑ **Anxiety.** The unpredictable nature of living with a chronic, relapsing disease—and the uncertainty of when the next exacerbation will occur or how severe it may be—can be very unsettling.

TIP: Consider joining a support group for patients with MS, either in your community or online. Talking with people who understand can be helpful in dealing with anxiety and distress. Anti-anxiety medication may also help.

❑ **Mood Swings.** MS patients may experience vast emotional swings, going quickly from a neutral feeling to sadness, giddiness, irritability, or anger.

Sudden, involuntary episodes of laughing or crying, often as an inappropriate response to small things—known as the pseudobulbar affect—can take a toll on patients as well as their loved ones.

TIP: Since these emotional swings can have an impact on your home life, family counseling can be beneficial for everyone involved. Again, medications may help, so talk with your physician.

❑ **Guilt.** As the disease progresses and you lose the ability to do things that you used to be able to do for yourself, you may feel guilty from becoming more dependent on others.

TIP: With time and coping strategies, these feelings usually resolve themselves without treatment. However, supportive counseling and therapy groups can be beneficial.

❑ **Stress.** Life is full of all sorts of stress, but MS adds another layer of disease-related stress to the mix.

TIP: Since stress is unavoidable, the best strategy is to learn to manage it. Do whatever you find relaxing. Also, try to simplify your life by eliminating activities that you don't really need to do.

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